Published on *The Writing Instructor* (http://writinginstructor.com)

Writing and Science

Composing Nature

Author(s):

Richard Johnson-Sheehan

Publication History:
The Writing Instructor, September 2007

Nature writing is perhaps the most American form of writing. It celebrates America's wilderness and open spaces. It also laments America's greed and exploitation of the environment. Perhaps most of all, nature writing touches our spirits, inspires us, and summons us.

In college writing courses, it seems as though more and more students are interested in writing about environmental, ecological, and outdoor issues. Their interest might be credited to a few different reasons. First, the environment is a high profile issue in the media. As a culture, Americans may be finally coming to terms with their wanton exploitation of the land and the limits of our natural resources. Second, in many ways, the new mark of American individualism is to be experienced in the outdoors. Outdoor activities like hiking, camping, rock climbing, mountain biking, fishing, and hunting have become synonymous with being an American. But perhaps the most important reason for our students' heightened interest in the outdoor issues is the use of the environment as a locus out of which educators can teach a variety of subjects. Whereas diversity and gender issues served as focal points in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, today teachers at all levels have centralized environmental issues in their educational programs. Indeed, as the exigency of civil rights issues has leveled off, ecological awareness has become a powerful backdrop for education at all levels.

The environment is a ready-made subject in writing classrooms, and we find teachers at all levels encouraging students to write about nature and environmental issues. Ecological awareness appeals to students across the political spectrum. Some students can write about global warming, the importance of alternative energy sources, or the effects of pollution. Others can extol their enjoyment of hunting, fishing, or camping while arguing passionately for preserving wildlife habitat and restoring wetlands. Meanwhile, environmental issues offer cross-disciplinary writing topics for students in the arts, humanities, sciences, engineering, medicine, and other fields. In short, environmental issues provide a equitable meeting place for students from a variety of different backgrounds, interests, and ideologies. There are also many pedagogical advantages to bringing environmental issues into the writing classroom, as proposed by ecocomposition theory. The main advantage, we believe, is that ecological issues offer social and political contexts within which students can write and interact.

In this article, I first discuss a form of environmental writing called 'nature writing,' Later in the article, I offer situated learning strategies for bringing nature writing into the composition course. In most ways, writing about the environment is similar to writing

about other subjects. In writing classes, students can learn how to compose descriptively or persuasively about environmental issues. But, as I argue in this article, nature writing invites us to go beyond description and persuasion. It invites us, as writers, to *move* the readers, inspire them. American nature writers—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Ann Zwinger, Edward Abbey, John Muir, and Annie Dillard, among numerous others—do more than simply describe natural settings or persuade us to act responsibly in the outdoors. They touch our spirits. Not suprisingly, many of our students also want to learn how they can effect their readers in this way. They want their writing to fully express their passion for the natural world. My aim in this article is to offer ways to bring nature writing fully into the composition classroom.

Defining Nature Writing

To begin, what is meant by nature writing? According to eco-critic Lawrence Buell, an "environmental text" is one that meets four criteria:

- The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
- The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
- Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (7–8).

Thoreau is held up as Buell's prototype environmental writer, and *Walden* is offered as the prototypical environmental text. Indeed, America has produced numerous writers who work within Buell's guidelines, and there is a rich vein of American environmental writing extending back over two hundred years. Nevertheless, we believe nature writing, as a genre, goes beyond these four criteria. Nature writing somehow engages our imaginations by capturing the essence of landscapes, places, and wildlife—much as a portrait painter strives to "capture the soul" of a subject on canvas. It is this feeling of movement, or inspiration, that defines nature writing as a specific genre within the domain environmental texts.

What is it about nature writing that inspires the reader? It might help to look at a few examples, the first from contemporary writer Ann Zwinger's *Mysterious Lands.*

> Looking out over the pure sweep of seamless desert, I am surprised to realize that the easy landscapes stifle me—closed walls of forests, ceilings of boughs, neat-trimmed lawns, and ruffled curtains of trees hide the soft horizons. I prefer the absences and the big empties, where the wind ricochets from sand grain to mountain. I prefer the crystalline dryness and an unadulterated sky strewn from horizon to horizon with stars. I prefer the raw edges and the unfinished hems of the desert landscape. Desert is where I want to be when there are no more questions to ask. (132–33)

And, here is an example from John Muir's *The Mountains of California—*

> Most people like to look at mountain rivers, and bear them in mind; but few care to look at the winds, though far more beautiful and sublime; and though they become at times about as visible as flowing water [. . .] and when we look around over an agitated forest, we may see something of the wind that stirs it, by its effects upon the trees. Yonder it descends in a rush of water-like ripples, and sweeps over the bending pines from hill to hill. Nearer, we see detached plumes and leaves, now speeding by on level currents, now

> whirling in eddies, or, escaping over the edges of the whirls, soaring aloft on grand, upswelling domes of air, or tossing on flame-like crest. Smooth, deep currents, cascades, falls, and swirling eddies, sing around every tree and leaf, and over all the varied topography of the region with telling changes of form, like mountain rivers conforming to the features of their channels. (472)

One common characteristic of these passages is their appeal to the readers' sense of style and eloquence. Perhaps the proper word might even be 'grace.' The words and phrasings are vivid, rich, and compelling. They fairly beg to be read aloud. Readers can see, hear, and feel these words—the phrasing resonates deep within the reader.

To achieve this effect, nature writers regularly use techniques that classical rhetoricians have called the *grand* style. The grand style is specifically designed to strike the senses, making it especially applicable to nature writing. This style involves the quality that Longinus seeks to describe in *On the Sublime.* He writes "For grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant" (347). Sublimity is intended to go beyond persuasion, producing a powerful emotional impact on its readers. Even more importantly, as Longinus stresses, it is designed to awaken readers by appealing to their higher natures. Indeed, this is what makes grand style so effective in nature writing. Nature writing is often meant to rouse readers, resensitizing them to landscape and place. Longinus himself is aware of the connection between nature and the sublime. He writes, "Though nature is on the whole a law unto herself in matters of emotion and elevation, she is not a random force and does not work altogether without method" (347). The affiliation between nature and the sublime is ever palpable. Oravec goes so far as to say that "the sublime is the founding narrative—the primary trope—in the rhetoric of environmentalism"(73). We see nature as sublime, and recognize the grandeur, power, and wonder of the natural world. Writers express this sense of the sublime through their use of the grand style, which aligns nature with human nature and inspires readers.

Our initial premise, therefore, is that nature writing, as a genre, distinguishes itself from other forms of environmental prose by strategically employing techniques of the grand style. To illustrate, consider Edward Abbey's classic, *Desert Solitaire* (1968). Written about Abbey's experiences as a ranger at Arches National Park in Utah, *Desert Solitaire* is often described as a *Walden* in the desert. It has long been held up as a classic work of ecological rhetoric. And yet, curiously enough, readers of *Desert Solitaire* often rave about the first half of the book, but they lament how the second half seems to "lose it." The first half is spiritual and uplifting. You want to grab your backpack, fill your water bottle, and walk out into the desert. You want to hang out with the snakes and scorpions and feel the searing heat of the desert in midsummer. The second half of *Desert Solitaire,* however, is somewhat uninspiring and flat. What changed? A critical look at *Desert Solitaire* reveals that the difference between the first and second half of the book is not due to a shift in content or organization. After all, the content and organization of each chapter is rather consistent—Abbey uses narrative to describe a strange adventure he or someone else had in the beautiful but unforgiving desert. The difference between the first and second half of the book is the style Abbey uses. The first half of the book is consistently poetic and moving—a good example of the grand style as Cicero, Augustine, or Longinus might define it. The second half of the book, however, is much less poetic. Abbey shifts exclusively to a "middle" or even "plain" style, and his writing becomes increasingly prosaic and unspiritual. In the first half of the book, Abbey is like an inspired painter, capturing the essence of the desert for his readers. In the second half, the inspiration seems to fade as Abbey simply describes what he sees in the desert and exhorts his readers to accept his opinions. In the second half of the book, there seems to be little attempt to move the readers.

According to Buell's criteria, the second half of Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* still falls safely within the boundaries of environmental writing. After all, environmental prose is often simply descriptive or persuasive. But readers expect something more from nature writing—they want the words to inspire them. Our understanding of nature writing, therefore, is in line with Buell's four criteria for an environmental text. With Buell, we agree that the natural world must be more than a framing device for writing, and that human history must be entwined with natural history. We also agree that nature writing must go beyond human interest, and it must embrace human accountability to the environment. However, we would like to go one step further. Nature writing should also strive to touch the spirit, thus renewing readers' connection with landscape. The best nature writers regularly elevate their style above descriptive and persuasive prose.

This understanding of nature writing is also consonant with definitions being forwarded in the field of eco-criticism. In *The Norton Book of Nature Writing,* Robert Finch and John Elder point out that "nature writing fulfills the essay's purpose of *connection.* It fuses literature's attention to style, form, and the inevitable ironies of expression with a scientific concern for palpable fact." (25). Thus, according to Finch and Elder, nature writing is a form of lyrical prose, melding factual information and observation. It goes beyond the taxonomic descriptions found in a scientific or environmental text, because the writer is keenly aware of style and the arts of narrative. Likewise, as Frank Stewart points out in *A Natural History of Nature Writing* (1995), nature writing holds a closer resemblance to poetry than do other types of prose. Like a poet, the nature writer is concerned with the textures and tastes, sights and sounds, feelings and thoughts that are experienced when an individual is engaged with nature. Or, as Stewart puts it, "nature writers have made the world larger and richer by giving us ways of seeing with our hearts and imaginations as well as with our eyes" (xxiii). Like lyric poetry, nature writing is intended to capture and express essence, specifically of landscape and place. Even further, it also seeks to capture the essential connectedness between landscape and the individual. To put it in the words of Barry Lopez, there are "two landscapes—one outside the self, the other within" (64). Nature writing intimately explores the connection between these two landscapes. Scott Slovic reflects this point by arguing that nature writers are interested in achieving "heightened attentiveness to our place in the natural world," striving to awaken environmental consciousness within themselves and their readers (3).

Nature Writing and American Sermonics

Naysayers might suggest that the idyllic elements of nature writing are unteachable. They might point out that asking students to inspire their readers is a bit much, especially when they often struggle to simply describe and persuade. We believe quite the opposite. Nature writing and the grand style *are* teachable in writing classrooms. And, even more importantly, students *want* to learn how to fully express their passions and energy. They want to know how to convey their feelings to the readers. In our experience, once students learn how to use the grand style, the added ability to move readers often stirs their interests in writing, stimulating their imagination. Even weak writers, given the ability to inspire, often gain a renewed commitment to writing.

Classical rhetoricians certainly believed that grand style was teachable, and their books are filled with practical advice about how to move readers. But what is the grand style? Since antiquity, classical rhetoricians like Cicero, Quintilian, and Augustine have divided style into three levels: plain, middle, and grand. In *Orator,* Cicero defines the functions of these three styles as follows:

> He then will be an eloquent speaker—to repeat my former definition—who can discuss trivial matters in a plain style, matters of moderate significance in

> the tempered style, and weighty affairs in the grand manner. (379)

In *De Oratore,* Cicero writes that the primary characteristic of the grand style, which distinguishes it from the plain and middle styles, is an attention to how words "strike the senses" (239). Specifically, the grand style allows readers to *see, hear,* and *feel* the words in the text. For Cicero, sight was the most powerful quality of the grand style. He writes,

> For such expressions of the odor of urbanity, the softness of humanity, the murmur of the sea, and sweetness of language, are derived from the other senses; but those which relate to sight are much more striking, for they place almost in the eye of the mind such objects as we cannot see and discern by the natural eyes (238).

Hearing and feeling, however, were also important characteristics of Cicero's understanding of the grand style. He believed that a writer, like a musician or poet, could add sound and texture to prose by paying attention to rhythm, pace, and tone. Indeed, many writing teachers encourage their students to "write visually" or "write through the senses." For the most part, these teachers are unknowingly prompting their students to use the grand style, although in an ad hoc way.

In *On Christian Doctrine,* a book primarily about the rhetoric of preaching, Augustine refined the three levels of style by assigning them distinct roles. He writes,

> But although our teacher must be a speaker on important matters, he should not always speak of them in the grand style, but rather use the restrained style when teaching and the intermediate style when censuring or praising something. But, when action must be taken and we are addressing those who ought to take it but are unwilling, then we must speak of what is important in the grand style, the style suitable for moving minds to action (125).

According to Augustine, all three styles are applicable to different forms of preaching. Plain style is suitable for instructing or informing. The middle style is most appropriate for exhorting people to believe or act differently—that is, to persuade them to change their minds. The grand style is used when members of the audience know what should be done, but they are reluctant to take action. For the most part, according to Augustine, the grand style is to not be used when teaching others or persuading them to change their minds (142). After all, in instructional or exhortive contexts, the grand style can seem overly ostentatious, perhaps even bombastic. Instead, the grand style should be reserved for times when the audience needs to be moved or inspired (141–142). In the end, Augustine suggests that the mark of an effective preacher is the ability to go beyond informing and persuading. An effective preacher must also be able to motivate and animate with words.

But what does instruction on fifth-century preaching have to do with American nature writing? Interestingly, the two traditions intertwine, specifically in the person of Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of America's earliest nature writers. As a student at Harvard, Emerson originally aimed to fill a university chair as a professor of rhetoric (Oliver 119). His studies included the works of Cicero, Augustine, and Longinus. Moreover, he would have almost certainly studied the rhetorics of Hugh Blair and George Campbell, whose works on rhetoric were the dominant texts in American colleges in the early nineteenth century. Emerson did not go on to receive that chair in rhetoric. Instead, he made his living as a Unitarian preacher, employing the techniques he garnered from classical rhetoricians. Seeking to break away from the institutionalized style of European homiletics, Emerson used grand style techniques to develop an epideitctic discourse

"whose end was to teach and delight, to pass on the established values of the culture and thus to sustain the common ground" (Clark and Halloran 2). In other words, Emerson applied the grand style to preaching, much as Augustine described it in *On Christian Doctrine.* More importantly to nature writing, Emerson also went on to write *Nature* (1835) which, next to Thoreau's *Walden,* is perhaps the most influential early nineteenth-century American work of nature writing.

Indeed, American sermonics and nature writing share a common heritage. In *Nature,* Emerson consciously applied his sermonic use of the grand style to his writings about nature, striving to move his readers. Later, Emerson's protégé, Thoreau, used the grand style in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854) to likewise lend spirituality to his prose. Thoreau, a fellow Harvard graduate well-versed in Cicero, Augustine, and Longinus, took on much of Emerson's sense of all-pervading divinity, intertwining sermonic rhetoric with nature writing. In "Politics in American Nature Writing," Slovic notes the curious similarity in style between sermons and texts about the natural world (97). In the end, we see that nature writing has been reliant on the grand style since the beginning—at first deliberately in the works of Emerson and Thoreau, and later intuitively by nature writers who followed in their footsteps.

One caveat before moving on. Grand style is sometimes confused with formal tone, which often involves abstruse diction, elaborate sentence structure, and lengthy paragraphs. In reality, though, grand style can be either informal or formal in tone. For example, Emerson's *Nature,* like much of his prose, is written in a formal tone. Today's readers often struggle with his full diction and complex sentences. But even the most informal texts and speeches can be moving due to their use of grand style. For example, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* Annie Dillard writes in an informal tone but still uses grand style techniques to inspire her readers. Our point is that grand style is defined by its use of visual, aural, and sensual techniques to move or inspire readers. It accomplishes this effect by striking the senses, creating impressions of sight, sound, and texture. Grand style is not defined by formality of tone.

Seeing and Hearing in Nature Writing

Let us now discuss how words can be used to strike the senses, starting with visual writing and following with aural writing. Unfortunately, "write visually" has become one of those oft-repeated English teacher comments like "write clearly" or "write more concretely" that leave students scratching their heads. We toss these chestnuts to our students as though writing visually or clearly is simply a matter of making up our minds to do so. Putting these chestnuts aside, we need to teach students *how* to write visually, not just advise them to do so.

Writing Visually

Writing visually starts with an attention to visual detail. A writer can help readers envision a particular scene by simply noting what the eyes can see, like colors, textures, and relationships among parts and wholes. Instead of merely saying, "Trees were in the valley below me," a writer can add a visual touch by saying, "Pinon trees dotted the broken, burnished earth in the valley below." The color and texture in this second sentence adds a vividness to the scene that the pallid first sentence cannot match. A writer can also pay attention to visual relationships among parts and wholes: "The black bear hastened into the brush, becoming part of the mountain again." In this sentence, the relationship between the black bear and the mountain draws the readers' attention to their interdependence. Indeed, much of nature writing is simply a matter of paying close attention to what the eye can see and the ways in which parts and wholes interrelate.

But visual writing requires more than attention to visual detail. It also means employing tropes like simile, analogy, and metaphor to create images in the minds of the readers. These particular tropes, as Aristotle suggests, make things "appear before the eyes" (1405b). Indeed, even a casual glance at the works of great nature writers will reveal their replete use of tropes to add a visual dimension to the text.

Similes and Analogies

Similes and analogies compare items that differ in genera but have similar characteristics. For example, we might write, "The tree swayed over us like a frail umbrella against the angry storm." In this simile, the items 'tree' and 'umbrella' differ in genera, but their common visual characteristics make them suitable for use in a simile. In most similes, the words 'like' or 'as' draw the readers' attention to these resemblances among words. To illustrate, in *Nature* Emerson writes,

> I see the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from day-break to sunrise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. (234)

Annie Dillard uses the following simile in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek:*

> In flat country I watch every sunset in hopes of seeing the green ray. The green ray is a seldom-seen streak of light that rises from the sun like a spurting fountain at the moment of sunset; it throbs into the sky for two seconds and disappears. One more reason to keep my eyes open (17).

And, in *Walden,* Thoreau writes,

> The water is a vitreous greenish blue, as I remember it, like those patches of winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown (203).

As illustrated in these examples, similes are used locally to offer a momentary image in the readers' minds. In most cases, the simile occupies one sentence or phrase without expansion. Writers simply use a simile to create a visual impression on the readers, and then they move on. In nature writing, as these examples show, similes are often used to express unique experiences that go beyond a simple statement of descriptive facts. Similes allow nature writers to illustrate the unfamiliar by drawing out its semblances to the familiar.

Analogies are extended similes, working on parallel planes. If a simile tends to take the form of 'A is like B' then analogies can be said to take the form 'A is like B, as C is like D.' For example, using an analogy, Abbey compares the mating of two snakes to a dance in *Desert Solitaire:*

> I happen to glance out the little window near the refrigerator and see two gopher snakes on my verandah engaged in what seems to be a kind of ritual dance. Like a living caduceus, they wind and unwind about each other in undulant, graceful, perpetual motion, moving slowly across the dome of sandstone. Invisible but tangible music is the passion which joins them . . . There I get down on my hands and knees and creep toward the dancing snakes . . . Obsessed with their ballet, the serpents seem unaware of my presence (20).

In this example, we find the analogy working on parallel planes. Specifically, it includes

two parallel similes, “snakes are like dancers” and “mating is like dancing.” Extending the analogy, Abbey introduces other dance-related concepts like music, ballet, graceful, and passion.

As visual tropes, similes and analogies are very much local devices, which appear on the face of a text. Nature writers use them to offer the readers quick visual comparisons, providing a glimpse into the scene. Then, the writer moves on, rarely using these tropes at length. Indeed, it is possible to extend similes and analogies into entire paragraphs or pages; but when used at length they often become tedious to the readers. After all, readers are willing to briefly visualize Emerson’s clouds as “fishes in the sea of crimson light” or Abbey’s gopher snakes as “ritual dancers.” But if similes or analogies are extended too far, the rational limits of these tropes soon become apparent. The comparisons between two unlike things become increasingly contrived and plastic.

Metaphors

Metaphors correspond to similes and analogies in their use of comparison to draw the readers’ attention to semblances. However, whereas similes and analogies are local devices, metaphors can be used to create ingrained perspectives from which the readers can conceptualize or reconceptualize nature. For example, Muir writes in *My First Summer in the Sierra,*

> The embowered river-reaches with their multitude of voices making melody, the stately flow and rush and glad exulting onsweeping currents caressing the dipping sedge-leaves and bushes and mossy stones, swirling in pools, dividing against little flowery islands, breaking grey and white here and there, ever rejoicing, yet with deep solemn undertones recalling the ocean (49).

Muir consistently uses this metaphor “river as chorus” throughout this book, returning to it over and over whenever water is mentioned. For Muir, the metaphor provides a consistent perspective from which his readers are urged to view rivers. As shown in this example, metaphor is typically more subtle than simile or analogy. Whereas similes or analogies tend to call attention to themselves, a metaphor tends to pass almost without notice. In the quote above, for example, Muir is not asking the readers to make a conscious comparison between rivers and choruses. Rather, the chorus-related words are woven inconspicuously into his descriptions of the river.

Scholars have struggled to understand metaphor since the dawn of rhetorical studies. Nevertheless, most scholars agree about what metaphors do. Metaphors, as Kenneth Burke suggests, are used to maintain or change perspective (503). They urge us to see things in a particular way. For example, as Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate in *Metaphors We Live By,* a metaphor like ‘thought is light’ structures how Westerners understand the thinking process (3). “He enlightened me.” “Suddenly, I could see what she was talking about.” “His ideas were a bit murky.” These deep-seated cultural metaphors shape the way we conceptualize and discourse about reality. Once identified, these cultural metaphors can often be used effectively in nature writing. For example, using the cultural metaphor ‘time is a stream,’ one could write, “Time slowed down to a trickle, as I watched the rainbow trout swish quietly up stream.” Playing with the ‘thought is light’ metaphor, one might say, “It was only when I turned off my lantern that I really understood what Parsons Lake meant to me.” These uses of metaphor consciously play with deep-seated metaphors that shape Western thought and culture.

A second use of metaphor in nature writing is to change the readers’ perspective. Here is Abbey using personification, a specialized form of metaphor, to change the readers’

perspective about a juniper tree:

> A female, this ancient grandmother of a tree may be three hundred years old; growing very slowly, the juniper seldom attains a height greater than fifteen or twenty feet even in favorable locations. My juniper, though still fruitful and full of vigor, is at the same time partly dead: one half of the divided trunk holds skyward a sapless claw, a branch without leaf or bark, baked in the sun and scoured by the wind to a silver finish, where magpies an ravens like to roost when I am not too close.
>
> I've had this tree under surveillance ever since my arrival at Arches, hoping to learn something from it, to discover the significance in its form, to make a connection through its life with whatever falls beyond (27).

Novel metaphors like 'a tree is a grandmother' set metaphorical perspectives that run throughout a text. In this quote from Abbey, for example, the metaphor is being used to invent a perspective from which we can view *all* trees differently. In Abbey's work, old trees are alive and noble, much like grandmothers, and if we observe them closely, we can learn the secrets of life.

By creating novel metaphors, nature writers can challenge the readers' established perspectives about reality. For example, nature writers seem to invariably take on the 'time is money' metaphor that dominates Western culture. Exposing this metaphor as a falsehood, they show us that time is not spent, cannot be saved, cannot be lost. Another common cultural metaphor which is regularly challenged in nature writing is the 'nature is a machine' perspective that guides much of Western science, technology, and medicine. Nature writers regularly urge their readers not to see nature as a mechanical, manageable entity working according to predictable laws. In doing so, they urge people to view nature differently, change their perspective. By definition, metaphors are patently false (e.g. time is not money, nature is not a machine), so these tropes provide a fertile ground on which to challenge common assumptions and understandings of nature.

Writing with Sound

The ability to write with sound may be the true distinguishing quality of a great nature writer. Nature writers help their readers listen to nature. To add an aural quality to prose, they often use four sound techniques—onomatopoeia, rhythm, alliteration, and assonance.

Onomatopoeia

An onomatopoeia is a word whose sound imitates the thing it is trying to describe. For instance, the sounds of a "crackling fire" or a "murmuring river" are echoed in the words themselves. Here is Thoreau's description of the pond in *Walden:*

> The bullfrogs trump to the usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled (153).

Words like trump, usher, rippling, fluttering, and ruffled all create a tone for this description that goes beyond seeing. We can actually hear the lake in this description.

Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* is another text that heavily uses onomatopoeia. Here is a short

list of words drawn from the pages of *Desert Solitaire:*

> crackle, rustle, scuffle, brittle, whispers, slithers, hisses, mutter, thunder, crawled, sliding, roar, whistling, ticking, cough, babble, mumble, rattle, sizzle, bawling, yawning, gasp, splash, scratching, clattered, buzzing, humble.

These kinds of words add a dimension of sound to nature writing that the readers can actually hear. All of us hear a little voice in our heads when we read silently. That little voice evinces these words, sounds them out. When read out loud, these words capture the sounds of nature for the readers.

Rhythm

Similarly, rhythm is also an important part of nature writing. To the native English speaker, language sounds smoothest when it is predominantly written in iambic prose (Eastman 190, 192). Iambic prose tends to alternate unstressed with stressed syllables, creating a gentle cadence in the minds of the readers. For example, here are a few iambic lines from Thoreau:

> In those driving northeast rains which tried the village houses so, when the maids stood ready with mop and pail in front entries to keep the deluge out, I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection (156).

Of course, as this example shows, the whole sentence or paragraph need not be iambic to establish a natural rhythm. Rather, the dominance of iambic prose will calm the tone and make the writing sound soothing to the readers. Iambic verse establishes a heartbeat for the text.

On the other hand, when nature writers want to develop a sense of discord or tension, they break out of this iambic pattern. Here is Abbey in a more agitated moment, where the rhythm matches his agitation.

> This being the case, why is the Park Service generally, so anxious to accommodate that other crowd, the indolent millions born on wheels and suckled on gasoline, who expect and demand paved highways to lead them in comfort, ease and safety into every nook and corner of the national parks? (49)

The rhythm here is erratic and somewhat unpredictable. This passage includes a mixture of differently stressed words (iambs, trochees, anapests, dactyls, and spondees) that create an irregular heartbeat in the text. Due to his use of rhythm, readers not only read about Abbey's frustration, they experience his anger in his erratic prose.

Another way to use rhythm in writing is to pay attention to sentence length. In *De Oratore,* Cicero suggests that a harmonious rhythm is attained by using sentences that are the length of one breath (243). Contemporary nature writers tend to follow this advice, adjusting sentence length to fit the nature of the scene. When they want to increase the pace, they shorten the sentences, sometimes even using fragments. Short and fragmented sentences add intensity by making the readers feel like they are breathing faster with the writer. Longer sentences, on the other hand, slow down the pace of the text. They are best used when the writer is observing a still landscape or trying to describe a peaceful moment.

Alliteration and Assonance

Use of alliteration and assonance can also elevate writing to the level of the grand style. Alliteration is the recurrence of consonant sounds, usually in neighboring words, while assonance refers to the recurrence vowel sounds. The close repetition of specific sounds in prose tends to intensify the phrases, creating an aural theme that the readers can hear (Eastman 195). Here is an example of alliteration from Dillard:

> It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff. (33)

The 's' sound in this passage binds the text together, giving it a consistent tone for the readers. The recurrence of 's' words also intensifies the prose by setting a theme that the readers can hear. Here is an example of assonance, also from Dillard:

> A male English sparrow, his mouth stuffed, was hopping in and out of an old nest in a bare tree, and sloshing around in its bottom. A robin on red alert in the grass, trailing half a worm from its bill, bobbed three steps and straightened up, performing unawares the universal robin trick. (113)

The "o" sound is repeated here in proximate words, such as hopping, sloshing, bottom, robin, and bobbed. Assonance is more subtle than alliteration, because vowels lack the sharper quality of consonants. But both of these techniques can be used effectively to weave the text together with concordant sound.

To this point, we have mainly dwelled on the characteristics of grand style and its use in nature writing. The grand style offers a welcome addition to the plain academic prose that is commonly stressed in composition classrooms. Unfortunately, in many writing classrooms, anything beyond plain style is seen as a luxury—something to be reserved exclusively for advanced students or English majors. And yet, style is what attracts young students to writing. After all, today's students are highly visual and aural people, making the use of tropes especially interesting to them. They enjoy playing with the visual and aural imagery available through these techniques. Learning about the grand style often awakens their interest in writing by appealing to their senses, unlike the plainness of academic prose, which rarely captures their imagination.

Bringing Nature Writing into the Composition Classroom—Taking Writing Back Outside

Writing about nature usually means situating yourself in landscape and place, learning to find your place within social and natural communities. Situated learning is in concert with this understanding of nature writing. Situated learning has received a great amount of attention recently (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman; Blakeslee, Freedman and Adam; Russell). Though these theorists focus on 'social' contexts, we suggest that natural contexts also provide ideal situations in which students can write. The basic premise of situated learning is that students learn best by being immersed in the activities, communities, and contexts in which they want to participate. Or, simply put, *people learn best by doing.* Nature writing offers a special challenge to situated learning, urging us to expand our understanding of how students learn to write. Until now, theorists of situated learning have concentrated on the 'social' contexts in which people communicate. Consequently, most of their theories put an emphasis on interactions among people in academic and non-academic contexts. But what if we expand the

definition of situatedness to include the environment? What if students were taught to work within both social *and* natural contexts?

To answer this question, let us consider the basics of situated learning theory and then discuss how it can be extended beyond the social realm. Situated learning, also referred to as "activity theory," is essentially interpretive, or hermeneutic (Kent 3). By hermeneutic, we mean that writers/interpreters are always situated in an evolving context in which they act and interact. Four key elements play an important role in situated learning: activity, interactivity, mentorship, and context:

> *Activity.* In situated learning theories, knowledge is not something to be contained or held in the gray matter. It is not something to be transmitted from teacher to student like a commodity. Rather, knowledge is defined as a person's ability to maneuver and perform within specific contexts. The emphasis here is pragmatic in nature. To *know* something is to *know how to do it.* In other words, people need to be actively engaged with the things and abilities about which they want to learn and understand. Thus, activity is the basis for learning and developing knowledge.
>
> *Interactivity.* Students need to learn how to interpret, act, and react to the evolving contexts around them. The relationship between individuals and their contexts is hermeneutic in nature. By hermeneutic, we mean that individuals are continuously interpreting and responding to the changing social and natural landscape in which they are situated.
>
> *Mentorship.* The third element in situated learning is the importance of mentorship in learning. Situated learning suggests that education is best provided under the guidance of experienced practitioners (Blakeslee 126). Initially, authority is granted to the experienced practitioners, with student working under their guidance. As the apprentices gain ability, they take on more autonomy, gaining more authority as they are more able to engage in the activities of the community.
>
> *Context.* The final element is the importance of context to learning. Students need to be immersed in the social and cultural contexts in which their learning will be used. As participants, they need to learn how to interpret the exigencies of these contexts, and then they need to learn how to use their powers of expression to shape these exigencies to their communication needs.

Teaching nature writing extends our understanding of situatedness by acknowledging that human activity is also shaped by *place* and *landscape.* Indeed, one of the shortcomings of situated learning theory to this point is that its theorists have exclusively emphasized social contexts, not paying attention to the natural contexts that shape the activities of people. But place and landscape are essential to understanding how people act and interact. For instance, those of us who live in the mountainous West know that our landscape shapes our activities much differently than would the landscapes of the Northwest, Midwest, or East. Indeed, just as individuals are shaped by their society and culture, their societies and cultures are shaped by the natural landscapes in which they are situated.

In many cases, our relationship to landscape and to place is overlooked or neglected in our modern lifestyles. However, as concerns about the environment become more paramount, our relationships to place and to the natural world will shift and grow. Ideally, we will "envision ourselves less as autonomous individuals than as collaborators who

are not only dependent upon but also literally connected to our local environments in complex ways" (Owens1). We can assist our students to perceive their own relationships to place, to recognize that our emotional landscapes are shaped by our physical landscapes, and to see that the environment and the natural world are at the core of who and what we are.

Situated learning is, in many ways, a foundation for ecocomposition. According to Dobrin and Weisser, "ecocomposition inquires as to what effects discourse has in mapping, constructing, shaping, defining, and understanding nature, place, and environment; and, in turn, what effects nature, place, and environment have on discourse" (9). Ecocomposition recognizes that writing is located in place and environment, and looks to foster the relationship between the written and natural worlds. Dobrin and Weisser even suggest that writing is itself an ecological activity as it involves "connections, interactions, and relationships" (146). As a cross-disciplinary field of study, ecocomposition encourages a holistic and ecological view toward the natural world as well as the educational world in which we live and work.

How can we bring into writing courses an understanding of ourselves as part of an environment? How can we encourage students to become part of a writing community that interacts with the natural world? Your first step is to cultivate your students' relationship with the natural world and the environment around them. As their mentor, teach them how to observe closely, how to pay attention to their relationship with nature, and how to reconceptualize their relationship with nature. You can use writing to reawaken their active and interactive relationship with the outdoors, each other, and the communities in which they live. By showing students the world outside the classroom, we can help them see that writing about nature is an ecological activity. To foster this awareness, several writing techniques can be used that are already common in many composition classrooms.

Journaling . Nature writers, from Thoreau to Dillard, have used journals extensively to observe and reflect on their experiences with nature. Keeping a journal draws students into active relationships with their social and natural contexts (Murray 378; Foster 174; Hillocks 94). As we all know, it is one thing to experience something, but writing about it requires a higher level of engagement, a higher level of interactivity. Take your students out on campus, and ask them to write down their observations in a journal. Ask them to reflect on the ways in which their landscape shapes them as individuals and members of a society. Also, devise assignments that require them to seek out natural environments in which they can write. Of course, your students don't need to hike into the desert or a find stream bank at which to write. Even the most urban settings offer a rich interplay between humans and nature. In these settings, encourage your students to observe using all their senses. Ann Zwinger has said that—

> Nature writing is preserving a time and a place as a fly is preserved in amber, with every bristle and hair and wing vein intact [. . . as you observe] you consciously call on all six senses; you have a way of ticking them off in your mind: What does it smell like? What does it look like? (Nabhan and Zwinger 78)

Teaching students to hone their observation skills, through their senses, will translate into writing that is more vivid, more meaningful. When using all their senses, students will see, hear, feel, smell, and even taste the things they would have otherwise missed.In addition, journaling can help to foster what Roorda refers to as "a drama of solitude" or "a tale of absorption" (10), leading to an increased awareness not just of the world around us, but of ourselves.

Mentoring Through Reading. A common mantra among writing teachers is that good readers make good writers. Fortunately, the field of nature writing is replete with great writers, whose works students enjoy reading. Nature writers from Thoreau to Abbey to Williams are provocative and interesting to students, forming the basis of high-level class discussions on a variety of issues, not all of them environmentally-centered. These works also provide a basis for solid mentoring. Through close reading, students can be taught to pay close attention to how writers use language to describe, persuade, and inspire the readers. From this basic understanding, you can then work in tandem with these authors' texts, actively engaging students in a mentoring relationship. As their mentor, by highlighting the stylistic techniques evident in these works, you can help students identify what distinguishes effective writing from ineffective writing. Granted, few of us are 'expert' nature writers, but that is not all too important. What is important is the mentoring relationship we establish with our students. By adopting the role of mentor, we can use good reading as the foundation for shaping and strengthening their writing skills.

Playing with Tropes. You can develop classroom activities in which students learn to write visually and aurally with tropes. Start out by giving students a list of nature-related words. Or, better yet, ask them to draw some words from their journals. Then, ask them to use similes and analogies to describe or illustrate the items on their list of words. Further, selecting one or more of their favorite similes and analogies, have them freewrite through the various lenses these tropes provide. For example, a simile like "a pasture is like an old man" could serve as a freewriting lens through which students creatively explore their views on pastures and old men. Indeed, by playing with visual tropes, students gain a more inclusive visual understanding of the concepts they are writing about. To teach students to write with sound, you can use the same techniques with onomatopoeia, alliteration, and assonance. Ask students to identify words that aurally reflect the meanings of the words on their lists. Tell them that the sounds of these words are less important than their meaning. Usually, students find that word choice can often match sound with meaning in ways that enhance their description of a natural concept.

Thinking and Rethinking Metaphors. If metaphors do indeed shape our understanding and interpretations of reality, including nature, students can be taught to identify, use, and change the metaphors on which our views of nature are constructed. For example, students could study metaphors like 'nature is a machine' or 'natural resources' or 'sustainable agriculture' to understand how these metaphors shape human interactions with nature. One activity that works well is to push the limits of a metaphor. For example, if nature is indeed a machine, should we treat it like we might treat any other machine, perhaps like a car? Do we drive it, maintain it, restore it, and ultimately scrap it when it is beyond hope? Pushing the limits of a metaphor is a good way to view the limits of our own understanding of nature. Another activity is to create new metaphors, and use them as invention tools for writing. For instance, have students redefine a local forest as a 'living body.' The trees and plants become lungs, the animals and their paths become a circular system, the insects and parasites become a digestive system. Using metaphors as invention tools is a way to enhance creativity, while encouraging students to interpret reality from different perspectives.

Shifting Perspective from Part to Whole. Finally, one of the basic concepts of hermeneutics, out of which much of situated learning is taken, is the relationship from part to whole and whole to part. These relationships essentially play with the figure-ground relationships that define much of our interactions with nature. In some sense, the part and the whole are mutually exclusive. For example, imagine you are observing a deer in a mountain meadow. The closer you concentrate on the deer, the less you are aware of its landscape. On the other hand, the more you pay attention to its landscape, the less aware you are of the deer. It is this mutually exclusive relationship between figure and ground, part and whole, that defines much of our relationship to the

outdoors. Students can learn to make such figure-ground observations about nature. For example, how is the deer part of a mountain meadow? And how is the mountain meadow part of the deer? Students can be also be shown that the more we concentrate on human needs, the less we pay attention to the landscapes in which humans live. On the other hand, the more attention we pay to nature, the less we pay to ourselves. Aldo Leopold captures this sentiment in his essay "Thinking Like a Mountain" where he writes, "The cowman who cleans his range of wolves does not realize that he is taking over the wolf's job of trimming the herd to fit the range. He has not learned to think like a mountain" (140). By teaching our students to shift from part to whole, whole to part, in their writing, we help them see their own situatedness in a complex social and natural world.

In the end, it is most important to actively engage students in their subject. They need to act, react, and interact with the world around them. By journaling, reading and discussing, playing with tropes, and shifting perspectives, they will find themselves actively and interactively engaged in the writing process.

Nature Writing Is Sermonic

To this point in this article, we have mainly focused on the techniques (*techne*) of the grand style and its application in nature writing. We have also shown how situated learning can bring these techniques into the classroom. And, indeed, students can broaden their expressive abilities considerably by practicing and using these techniques in their writing. That said, we believe there is something more significant afoot in nature writing. The inspiration felt in this kind of prose is more than simply a favorable reaction to stylistic devices. Rather, nature writing moves us because it touches us differently than other kinds of writing. It moves us by appealing to our spiritual selves.

By teaching nature writing, we reintroduce an important element of humanism into the composition classroom—that is, that humans are shaped by nature, by their landscapes. One of the shortcomings in composition studies today is that our discipline has increasingly focused on teaching students how to write plainly, excluding other kinds of writing styles. We show students how to write plain sentences and how to form predictable paragraphs. We implicitly dissuade them from bringing passion (*pathos*) into their work, often limiting their writing to arguments that rely exclusively on reason (*logos*) and credibility (*ethos*). Bringing nature writing and the grand style back into composition restores an important quality of rhetoric that has been lost—the idea that humans are more than rational machines, divorced from the natural world. Unfortunately, our secular anxieties about spiritual issues have allowed us to banish the human spirit from our teaching, i.e. the passion that binds us together and connects us with the Earth. Or, as Richard Weaver argues in his landmark article, "Language is Sermonic,"

> Man is not nor ever can be nor ever should be a depersonalized thinking machine. His feeling is the activity in him most closely related to what used to be called his soul. To appeal to his feeling is not necessarily an insult; it can be a way to honor him, by recognizing him in the fullness of his being (1360).

Ironically, it takes a Platonist like Weaver to remind our postmodern age about the role and importance of rhetoric. He argues that language is sermonic, because "we are all of us preachers in private or public capacities" (1360). In other words, as writers, it is our intent to not only convey information but to also use language to convey its importance. Language can be used to lift up the human spirit and direct our passions toward noble ends. Aldo Leopold is a good example of a writer who recognizes the need to touch his readers in this way; in *Sand County Almanac,* "Leopold subtly builds into his argument a

mystical element" (Killingsworth and Palmer 56). One of Leopold's aims as a writer is to meld science with the mystical, and to persuade readers of the importance of having a healthy respect for nature: a land ethic. Other nature writers, whether they openly acknowledge it or not, in part have the goal of effecting a change in our attentions toward the environment as well as awakening our passions.

Some will certainly scoff at such a role for rhetoric, but they are missing the point. In composition studies, we have been too indoctrinated in the business-model of human interaction. Too often, we justify the teaching of composition and rhetoric in terms of productivity and efficiency. We implicitly and explicitly tell students that their efforts to master communication skills will be repaid as they continue their education and eventually enter the workplace. We tell economic players, like college administrators, state governments, and business leaders, that we are preparing citizens who will do the people's work. The problem with these rationalizations is that they often become ends in themselves. Productivity and efficiency are held up as universal values, as though simply making product and making it more efficiently are humanity's primary goals. The argument for composition and rhetoric, therefore, becomes one of enlightened self-interest. The student accepts our instruction, because he or she perceives some kind of economic reward in the future. Society is also presumably working through enlightened self-interest, supporting our place in the university because we tell them that we are forging or reforging the members of a present or future working class.

The question is whether we can offer students and society more. In this postmodern age, it is no longer in vogue to suggest that education, including education in rhetoric, can help students become better people. More productive, yes. More efficient, yes. Better human beings, perhaps not. In composition and rhetoric, we shy away from teaching values for fear of treading on our students' half-formed sensibilities. Instead, we tell ourselves and our students that we are teaching them how to "think critically" or "express themselves clearly." What we need to do now is re-introduce an ethic and even a spirituality to our teaching. Or, as Weaver points out,

Finally, we must never lose sight of the order of values as the ultimate sanction of rhetoric. No one can live a life of direction and purpose without some scheme of values. As rhetoric confronts us with choices involving values, the rhetorician is a preacher to us, noble if he tries to direct our passion toward noble ends and base if he uses our passion to confuse and degrade us (1360).

How does all this talk of spirituality connect with nature writing? In *A Sand County Almanac,* Aldo Leopold argues for the development of a "land ethic," which goes beyond the personal and social ethics that bind human beings. A land ethic would invite humans into a communal relationship with nature. By developing this new ethic, Leopold suggests that we can restore our relationship with nature. He writes,

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him to cooperate (perhaps that there may be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, animals, or collectively: the land (239).

The land ethic situates the human within the context of nature, transforming them into citizens of a natural community. Internalizing this land ethic, humans become situated members of this natural community, casting off their roles as the conquerors of nature. They develop an ecological consciousness that goes beyond conservation or preservation. Indeed, humans develop a sense of community in which the land and its inhabitants are viewed as members of a larger community.

This rhetoric strengthens much of current composition theory. Theorists have long accepted the "social approach" to composition studies, putting heavy emphasis on interrelationships in human communities. By appealing to a land ethic and viewing writing as sermonic, we are essentially asking writing studies to think more broadly about what constitutes a community. Must we be limited only to human communities? Can we also accept that humans are situated within natural communities, as well as social communities? Would it be too risky to think of ourselves as shaped not only by human communities but also by natural landscapes? In the end, nature writing is sermonic. By bringing it into the classroom and taking our students outside, we reawaken their humanness. We reawaken an ethic and spirituality—our ultimate situatedness in nature—which have been suppressed in this secular age.

Works Cited

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.

Berkenkotter, Carol, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman. "Conventions, Conversations, and the Writer." *Research in the Teaching of English* 22 (1988): 9–44.

Blair, Hugh. "Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres." *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately.* Ed. James L. Golden and Edward P.J. Corbett. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990. 30–138.

Blakeslee, Ann. "Activity, Context, Interaction, and Authority: Learning to Write Scientific Papers in Situ." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 11 (1997): 135–69.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.

Burke, Kenneth. *Grammar of Motives.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1945.

Campbell, George. "The Philosophy of Rhetoric." *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately.* Ed. James L. Golden and Edward P.J. Corbett. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990. 145–72.

Cicero. *Orator.* Trans. G.L. Hendrickson and H.M. Hubbell. London: Loeb, 1939.

Clark, Gregory and S. Michael Halloran. Introduction. *Oratorical Culture in 19th Century America.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993. 1–28.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1990.

Dobrin, Sidney I. and Christian R. Weisser. *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition.* Albany: SUNY P, 2002.

Eastman, Richard. *Style.* New York: Oxford UP, 1978.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." *Essays and Lectures.* New York: Library of America. 1983.

Finch, Robert and John Elder. Introduction. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990. 19–28.

Foster, David. *A Primer for Writing Teachers.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1992.

Freedman, Aviva and Christine Adam. “Learning to Write Professionally: ‘Situated Learning’ and the Transition from University to Professional Discourse.” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 10 (1996): 395–427.

Hillocks, George. *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Johnson Sheehan, Richard. “Metaphor as Hermeneutic.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29 (1999): 47–64.

Kent, Thomas, ed. *Post-Process Theory.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Killingsworth, Jimmie and Jacqueline Palmer. *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1970.

Longinus. “On the Sublime.” *The Rhetorical Tradition.* Ed. P. Bizzell and B. Herzberg. New York: Bedford/St. Martins (2001): 346–358.

Lopez, Barry. “Landscape and Narrative.” *Crossing Open Ground.* New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988.

Muir, John. “The Mountains of California.” *Nature Writings.* New York: The Library of America, 1997. 311–547.

Muir, John. *My First Summer in the Sierra.* Reading UK: Cannongate, 1988.

Murray, Donald. “Write Before Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 29 (1978): 375–381.

Nabhan, Gary and Ann Haymond Zwinger. “Field Notes and the Literary Process.” *Writing Natural History: Dialogues with Authors.* Ed. Edward Lueders. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1989. 67–90.

Oliver, Robert T. *History of Public Speaking in America.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965.

Oravec, Christine. “To Stand Outside Oneself: The Sublime in the Discourse of Natural Scenery.” *The Symbolic Earth.* Ed. James G. Cantrill and Christine L. Oravec. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1996.

Owens, Derek. *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation.* NCTE, 2001.

Roorda, Randall. *Dramas of Solitude.* Albany: SUNY P, 1998.

Russell, David. “Activity Theory and Process Approaches: Writing (Power) in School and Society.” *Post Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm.* Ed. Thomas Kent (1999): 80–95

Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

Slovic, Scott. “Politics in American Nature Writing.” *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America.* Ed. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing.* Salt Lake City: U Utah P, 1992.

Stewart, Frank. *A Natural History of Nature Writing.* Washington: Island Press, 1995.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden.* Roslyn, NY: Black, 1942.

Weaver, Richard. “Language is Sermonic.” *The Rhetorical Tradition.* Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. New York: Bedford/St. Martins (2001): 1351–1379.

Zwinger, Ann Haymond. *The Mysterious Lands: A Naturalist Explores the Four Great Deserts of the Southwest.* Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1996.

Provenance:

Citation Format: Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. "Composing Nature." *The Writing Instructor.* 2007. http://www.writinginstructor.com/johnson-sheehan [2] (Date Accessed).

Review Process: Richard Johnson-Sheehan's essay was accepted for publication following blind, peer review.

Source URL: http://writinginstructor.com/johnson-sheehan

Links:
[1] http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/
[2] http://www.writinginstructor.com/johnson-sheehan